

Paris in Victoria

Bastion Square has a soupçon of the city of light for new feature film *Bastion Square*

LIKE COLE Porter, the producers of the upcoming Hollywood blockbuster *Flight 180* love Paris in the springtime. It's so dear to their hearts they've spent an estimated \$1 million US to replicate a slice of the fabled city of lights in Victoria for a four-night shoot of the film's new and improved final sequence. Filming is scheduled to wrap early Monday in Bastion Square.

If you've wandered past the historic square any evening since Thursday, or stopped for a drink at Garrick's Pub or a bite at Camille's Restaurant, two of the establishments that have remained open for business, your jaw will likely have dropped at the sight of the transformation.

Putting our image as a "wee bit of Olde England" on hold long enough to become a sliver of gay Paree for the \$25 million US movie, Bastion Square has become a twinkling oasis of Parisian charm dramatically illuminated by banks of huge, strategically placed megawatt lights.

On the square's west side, trees are dotted with hundreds of tiny lights, a large fake wrought-iron gateway supports a red Metro sign and a pink-and-blue neon sign for a brasserie is adorned with a miniature Eiffel Tower and a beckoning martini glass. Street signs point the way to locations like Place des Vosges, and, near the Maritime Museum, which is posing as a hotel, an amazingly authentic public restroom bearing a "Toilette" sign completes the picture.

On the other side of Langley Street, the Bedford Hotel is appended with cream-coloured Moët and Chandon awnings and a sidewalk cafe. Flowerpots abound, many in makeshift balconies with decorative railings, and faux-Parisian street vendors hawk designer coffee and French crepes.

The centre of attention is the health food restaurant, Re-bar, pressed into service as Le Cafe Miro 81, complete with

a plexiglass-covered sidewalk patio festooned with flowers and green wrought iron railings. Seated at one of the tables are the stars of the supernatural thriller about a high-schooler who has a premonition on board a plane bound for Paris that it will explode after take-off. When he and his friends are ejected from the plane for causing a ruckus, they find themselves stalked by a deadly force.

Rising star Ali Larter, the sexy blonde who played the seductive cheerleader in *Varsity Blues* and a victim in *The House on Haunted Hill*, smiles and blows a kiss as she jiggles in her seat to keep warm. A production assistant prepares heat packs to help her cope with the bone-chilling cold. As well, "heat mushrooms" — those trendy gas lampposts — provide added protection.

Seated beside her wearing a blue jacket and hooded sweatshirt is teen idol Devon Sawa (*Wild America*, *Idle Hands*). He plays Alex, the guy who predicted the air crash and is obsessed with impending death when his friends start dropping like flies. His skeptical pal, Carter, is played by Kerr Smith of *Dawson's Creek* fame, dressed in a black leather jacket that matches his hair.

In a few moments, a camera gliding along a curved dolly track will capture yet another take of Scene Four, in which Alex and his pals reminisce about the weird goings-on. It's part of additional footage being shot to improve the ending of the film that wrapped principal photography in Vancouver last summer and is already being promoted in trailers.

Producer Craig Perry said the decision to shoot a new ending was made based on reactions at preview screenings. The film, due in theatres March 17 with the title *Final Destination*, tested favourably except for the original finale.

"It was specific and organic to the trunk of the storyline we had generated up to that point but the audience just didn't care for it," he said. "It's not that anybody screwed up or that it was badly done, it was just not the kind of ending that the audience wanted."

Before the camera rolls for another take of the cafe dialogue, Sawa lets out his traditional warm-up whoop and, after the call to "Action!" is yelled, the scene begins.

"It feels weird being here," says Alex. "It's like we're finally completing a puzzle but a huge part of it is still missing."

Larter's character, Clear, raises a glass of red wine and says, "A toast ... to those missing pieces."

Smith hoists his glass of beer and adds: "To Terry!"

Behind the Screen



MICHAEL D. REID



RAY SMITH/TIMES COLONIST

Brasserie with outline of Eiffel Tower: Extras on the set are reminded to maintain French image.

In the background, time-released extras stroll by on cue, like Larry Fletcher, a film craftsman moonlighting as a beret-crowned pedestrian pulling a cart as he reads a newspaper.

It's a seemingly simple sequence, but looks can be deceiving.

There are countless obstacles — from the sounds of sirens to that pesky vapour coming out of the actors' mouths. But director James Wong keeps as cool as the night air that's producing it.

First assistant director, Patrice Leung, is an intense, dynamic marvel of efficiency as she puts out fires one by one and keeps up the pace in a business where time is money — big money.

"We have to have ice standing by to cut down on the breath coming out of the actors' mouths," she radios to a department head. Moments later, a craftsman

is on the scene suggesting "maybe we could put together a fortress of heaters."

Another problem is background audio that won't do in a scene like this.

"A reminder. Please mime your dialogue," Leung instructs some of the 48 extras providing background as nattily attired shoppers, businessmen, street vendors and waiters.

"No English please. We're supposed to be French here."

At one point, when a light dusting of snow seems imminent, crews hastily assemble an accordion-like tent to protect camera equipment and video monitors.

"Rain is no problem," says production manager Mary Eilts, "but snow is a no-no."

On the first of four nights of shooting from about 6 p.m.-6 a.m., the crew appears in high spirits.

"The first night's easy but the second night is tough because you're exhausted from the night before and you've got to get used to the overnight shift," observes a make-up artist wearing a pencil-thin moustache that is drawn on several crew members to get them in the mood.

It's like old home week, some say, since most are reunited members of the original crew.

"It's kind of like you've never been away almost. You just fall back into it. It's kind of like riding a bike," says Robert McLachlan, the director of photography best known for his work on the TV series *Millennium*.

He says filming scenes like the ones in Bastion Square, including a climactic bus crash that knocks the sign off the cafe's rooftop, is more challenging than shooting television.

"Shooting for TV is very forgiving because of the process where you go from negative to tape so you can manipulate the film more. It's almost foolproof. They can save you so much in post-production but this is classic film print and you've got to get it right the first time."

Having a sense of humour is essential to get through long film shoots, says a technician.

Sawa appears to subscribe to that theory. On the second night of shooting, as the crew prepared for a shot involving a gigantic fan that blows wind onto the patio and triggers a fiery flare-up to suggest a supernatural presence, real howling winds provided some stiff competition.

Quipped Sawa, his teeth chattering: "It's a beautiful spring day in Paris, isn't it?"